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ABSTRACT

Educators are concerned with the dual needs of students: the need to read and write effectively and coherently, the need to use standard grammar and punctuation, and the need to communicate effectively using what is called standard English. Unless teachers devise methods to assist students from different backgrounds in becoming proficient, society will continue to penalize all speakers of nonstandard dialects. There is every reason why nonstandard English speaking students must acquire the standard language and perfect their proficiency in it to the greatest extent possible. How people talk correlates with where they live, what educational opportunities they enjoy, and what their job prospects are. This paper discusses the difficulties and challenges that nonstandard English speakers encounter (especially in employment) and how the issue is political, sociological, and economic, as well as educational. The paper states that, wherever possible, a greater stress should be placed on communication skills, particularly on oral communication. It discusses using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) as a teaching strategy to facilitate correct pronunciation. According to the paper, the IPA is a clear and consistent system for representing the sounds in any language. The paper reports findings of a study with 100 students with 145 instances of vowels that were misarticulated, 223 instances of consonants, 50 dipthongs, 128 blends, and 72 ending sounds. It also reports significant differences between the pretest and posttest performance after instruction using the IPA--on the posttest 50% of the problems were corrected. (Contains 13 references.) (NKA)

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LINGUISTIC DISCRIMINATION:
A SOCIOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

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Linguistic Discrimination: A Sociolinguistic Perspective

Every year our schools, elementary, high school, and college, serve thousands of students who represent a wide variety of backgrounds and educational needs. Each year, as educators, we are concerned with their dual needs: the need to read and write effectively and coherently, the need to use standard grammar and punctuation, and the need to communicate effectively using what is called standard English. We are concerned with these needs, but most of our effort is geared toward teaching reading, writing, mathematics and English. Unfortunately, very little is done to assist our students in becoming proficient in the language they are expected to learn. Unless we devise methods to assist these students in becoming proficient, society will continue to penalize all speakers of nonstandard dialects. They will be penalized in their employability as well as their educational development in schools with middle-class curricula.

There is every reason why nonstandard English speaking students must acquire the standard language and perfect their proficiency in it to the greatest extent possible. Language in our

society, as in others, serves as a social indicator. How people talk correlates with where they live, what educational opportunities they enjoy, and what their job prospects are. Millions of Americans take it for granted that anyone who fails to speak standard English gives unmistakable evidence of his lack of education or even of his defective intellect. This traditional contempt for nonstandard English shows up in many ways, including both ridicule and discrimination in employment, but these attitudes are only rarely supported by any justification other than the simple assumption that there can be only a single correct way to speak a language (Burling, 1973).

Many people believe that individuals should be judged, not by the content of their character, but by the "correctness" of their speech. Each semester, 70 to 75 % of the freshman, sophomore, junior and senior students, exhibit similar nonstandard speech patterns. At the beginning of each semester, the first speech requirement is the speech of introduction. The students are asked to stand before the class and introduce themselves by telling other students who they are, where they're from, what their intended major is, what high school activities they were involved in, and what activities they hope to involve themselves in during their

tenure at the university. During those presentations, student after student can be heard making the same nonstandard speaking errors. They consistently say "git", "ax", "suster", "po-lice", "dat", "dem", etc. In a different setting, these students are viewed as illiterate and uneducated.

Gurth (1973) stated that the disadvantaged child, whether poor white or poor African American, speaks a variety of English:

> considered unacceptable by the teacher and the members of the prestigious group who use standard English. The disadvantaged child, therefore, has an additional task to cope with, the task of learning standard English in school, whereas the middle-class child has already learned it at home. He also has greater difficulty in learning to read, because, among other things, his reading materials are written in standard English. (p. 116)

If individuals use language in a way that others consider incorrect, or unacceptable, or nonstandard, they may be denied a job, a promotion, or in the case of children, a passing grade in school (Falk, 1978).

Kochman (1973) and Wiggins (1976) indicated that the main reason for the unemployment and social problems of African Americans is not their lack of competence in Standard English but the racism of whites:

> Millions of people in this country today do not speak standard English, and millions of them, if they are white, have good incomes. But in job-hunting in America, pigmentation is more important than pronunciation. (p.212)

The issue is political, sociological, and economic. In some circles, these noneducational dimensions overshadow all else.

Nonstandard English users, according to Anderson (1990), are at a disadvantage. At times they are ridiculed and are not given a chance to show their intellectual potential. Their use of a nonstandard American dialect does not imply that they lack intelligence to function in school environments and in the workplace. Roger Shuy, in "Language and Success," (cited in Bailey & Robinson, 1973), sees no reason for the denial of opportunity in the job market and in social and political circles:

> In clear terms of relationship of a person's use of language and employability, then, it can be concluded that it is dangerous to infer anything about a speaker's logic or intelligence on the basis of his use of the language. Far more revealing might be the person's social status, his education, or his geographical origins. Furthermore however tempting it may be to use a prospective employee's nonstandard grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary as a sign of his motivation or trainability, chances are that all one can accurately infer is that the candidate has grown up in a nonstandard English speaking environment. (Bailey & Robinson, 1973, p. 308)

While research showing the effect of nonstandard dialect use in job interviews is plentiful, offering instruction to "improve" speech indicates criticism not only of the language but also of the person. Since the "real world" is judgmental and critical, a great disservice is done to students by continuing to ignore this serious issue (Robbins, 1989).

How important is it for prospective job applicants to speak standard English? Many researchers seem to believe that the way a person dresses and his punctuality takes precedence over ability to perform in standard English. Approximately 70% of my students, at the beginning of the semester, also believe that if they have A's and B's on their transcripts and can prove themselves on the job by "doing a good job", then the way they speak should not make a difference. However, other studies have shown that employers tend to agree that oral communication and motivation are the most important characteristics. Shuy (1972) studied the responses of employers to taped nonstandard English speakers from lower and middle-class backgrounds (and therefore using different amounts of nonstandard English); he found that the employers' ratings indicated that significant nonstandard English usage affects employability. According to Hafer and Hoth (1983) educators must

try to inform students of employers' preferences and priorities and try to incorporate instructional activities that develop key characteristics and improve students' overall abilities and confidence levels. It would appear from this study that wherever possible, a greater stress should be placed on communication skills, particularly oral communication.

Adler (1985) believed as this researcher does. Something must be done for this population of people in order to insure their place in society. The "do nothing" strategy does a disservice to social dialect speakers.

In 1992, this researcher conducted a study focused on the possible use of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) as a teaching strategy to facilitate correct pronunciation. The IPA was intended for use in transcribing the sounds of any language that had discovered or might be discovered in the future. Its developer's aim was to allow anyone familiar with the system, no matter what his native language, to have a very good idea of how to pronounce an unknown language (MacKay, 1987). MacKay further stated that the IPA permits the use of a different symbol for each different (not just contrasting) sound.

The IPA was chosen because it is a clear and consistent system for representing the sounds in any language. It is a symbol system that identifies each sound precisely in order to avoid ambiguity and confusion. This sound system represents the sounds of the world's principal languages. The IPA has three advantages:

1. Each IPA symbol stands for one sound; that symbol always stands for the same sound—regardless of regular spelling of the word; and that sound is never represented by different symbol.
2. Because IPA symbols represent sounds, they can be used to accurately record how a speaker actually pronounces a word or phrase. The IPA makes it possible to represent differences in pronunciation of words or phrases.
3. Each IPA symbol stands for the same sound—no matter what the language.

For the above three reasons, the IPA could help in learning to pronounce any language correctly (King & DiMichael, 1978).

In teaching the phonetic alphabet, instruction consisted of using three syllable words with similar sounds to allow the students to hear the sound, detect the differences, and then transcribe the word based on the sound they heard. For example, the words get (correct pronunciation) and git (incorrect pronunciation) are contrasted. Once the students are able to hear the difference, they would then transcribe the words using the IPA to demonstrate the difference in sound. Transcribed, the words are

completely different. Get is transcribed [g ɛ t] and git is transcribed [gIt] thereby demonstrating the difference in the two sounds. The "th" sound is somewhat difficult to teach or at least takes longer for the students to grasp because there are two symbols for the "th" sound. One is a voiced "th" [ð] sound and the other is a voiceless "th" [θ] sound. Students must learn to distinguish between the two sounds and to use them appropriately. IPA instruction for this study lasted for eight weeks and consisted of 50 minutes of class treatment three times a week.

The students thought that the IPA would require them to learn a totally different symbol system from the English alphabet (orthographic) system. However, this was not the case. They used sixteen of those twenty-five English alphabet letters as IPA consonant symbols: [p b t d k g f v s z h l r w m n]. Each IPA symbol represents a phoneme which is a unique or distinctive speech sound—or sound family. This left only nine new IPA consonant symbols to learn. Many of the vowel sounds are similar to alphabet letters that the students were already accustomed to using.

The major hurdle in learning the IPA is to begin thinking in terms of SOUNDS rather than how a word is spelled. In order to facilitate listening to sound rather than spelling, nonsense sound combinations were used. For example, the students heard the meaningless (or nonsense) syllables, "Ip se pat" and tried to write them in IPA symbols. This way, they would not be tempted to figure out what the sounds meant. Instead they had to concentrate on individual sounds and syllables. The IPA transcription would be [Ip si pæ t].

Transcribing or phonetic transcription is a phoneme-by-phoneme interpretation of speech utilizing an alphabet system (such as the IPA) so as to represent all the sounds of a language without any overlap (Singh & Singh, 1982). The articulatory aspects of phonetics are: (a) consonants, (b) vowels, and (c) diphthongs. Those aspects, with examples, are as follows:

CONSONANTS

Symbol	**Example**	**Symbol**	**Example**
p	peep	θ	think
b	boy	ð	then
t	to	s	see
d	do	z	zoo

k	kiss	ʃ	ship
g	gas	ʒ	measure
f	for	h	house
v	very	m	mom
n	noon		sing
l	late	w	wish
j	yes	r	run
tʃ	chip	dʒ	jump

VOWELS

Symbol	Example	Symbol	Example
i	eat	ɔ	awful
I	it	o	owe
e	age	ʊ	hook
ɵ	ask	u	school
a	odd		up
ə	about	ɝ	bird
ɚ	mother		

DIPHTHONGS

Symbol	Example
ɔɪ	boy
aɪ	ice
aʊ	out
ju	few

Once the students learned the IPA, they were tested on their knowledge of the various symbols using the Standard English Evaluation Sheet (SEERS) which was developed by the researcher. The SEERS contained a list of 100 or more words. Words containing the sounds identified during initial testing were included in the SEERS in order to determine if the students were able to correctly hear, pronounce, and transcribe the sounds within the words.

Results of the present study indicated that of the 100 students participating in the study, there were 145 instances of vowels that were misarticulated, 223 instances of consonants, 50 diphthongs, 128 blends, and 72 ending sounds.

Significant differences were found to exist between the pre-test and post-test performance of students after instruction using the IPA. On the post-test, 72 of the 145 identified vowels sounds

were corrected, 156 of the identified 223 consonants, 31 of the 50 diphthongs, 75 of the 128 blends, and 40 of the 72 identified ending sounds. Over 50% of the problems were corrected. This would indicated that the IPA had achieved the purpose of alleviating some of the persistent phonological problems exhibited by the 100 students in the study.

The IPA can be instrumental in establishing new speech habits. Establishing these new habits will require three steps:

1. Awareness of the problem.
2. Development of new skills.
3. Transfer of the new skills into everyday use.

The results of this study suggest the following recommendations:

1. That those students who major in secondary education are required to learn the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) so that they are better equipped to assist their students in learning the dialect of prestige in their society.
2. Replication of this study using high school students. It is the contention of this researcher that high school students (9^{th} - 12^{th} grade) could learn the IPA and hopefully, by their freshman year in college, many of the nonstandard English problems could be alleviated.

The results of this study have far reaching implications for educators and students. Efforts should be made to validate the language experiences of students and to show them how their

language structure relates to the standard and a possible technique for reaching that standard. If standard English is the speech system used by members of the establishment, all members of our society should have the opportunity to learn this dialect system, thereby helping them to enter into the societal mainstream and to enjoy the benefits of a good education and a better chance at gainful employment.

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